



California Regional Water Quality Control Board Central Coast Region



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Arnold Schwarzenegger
Governor

July 27, 2010

PUBLIC NOTICE

California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Scoping Meeting for the Regulation of Waste Discharges from Irrigated Lands

Date: August 16, 2010

Time: 2:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.

Address: Central Coast Water Board, 895 Aerovista Place, San Luis Obispo, CA 93401. Individuals requiring special accommodations are requested to contact Shanta Keeling at (805) 549-3464 at least 5 working days prior to the meeting. TTY users may contact the California Relay Service at 1-800-735-2929 or voice line at 1-800-735-2922.

PURPOSE OF THE CEQA SCOPING MEETING

Central Coast Water Board (Water Board) staff will hold a CEQA scoping meeting to discuss the regulation of waste discharges from irrigated lands within the Central Coast Region. In 2011, the Water Board will consider adoption of a renewed conditional waiver of waste discharge requirements regulating discharges from irrigated lands. Water Board staff has proposed a renewal of the existing "Conditional Waiver of Waste Discharge Requirements for Irrigated Lands" (New Order) with revisions to control the discharges of nitrate, pesticides, and sediment to surface or ground water and reduce impacts to aquatic habitat from irrigated agricultural operations (Project). The New Order would require owners and operators of irrigated agricultural lands and facilities to control the discharges of waste so they do not cause exceedances of water quality standards by implementing management practices or operational changes, reporting on progress and effectiveness of practices or operational changes, and monitoring to verify compliance of individual operations with the terms of the New Order. Interested persons have proposed alternatives to the Water Board staff's proposal.

Water quality conditions in agricultural areas of the region are currently degraded or polluted by waste discharges from irrigated agricultural operations and activities that

impact aquatic habitat on or near irrigated agricultural operations¹. The most serious degradation is the result of fertilizer and pesticide use that has caused the chemicals to run off agricultural fields into surface waters from irrigation water or stormwater, or has leached into groundwater. Researchers estimate that tens of thousands of pounds of nitrate leach into groundwater in the Salinas Valley alone each year². Hundreds of drinking water wells serving thousands of people throughout the region have nitrate levels exceeding the drinking water standard³. Many streams are listed as impaired in the Central Coast Region for nutrients and pesticides or toxicity (from pesticides) on the Clean Water Act section 303(d) List of Impaired Waterbodies⁴. Additionally, sediment discharged from fields has further contributed to surface water degradation in several surface water bodies in the Central Coast Region⁴. Finally, in-stream aquatic habitat has been impaired by riparian vegetation removal that eliminates filtering of chemicals as they runoff from fields, and/or causes increases in temperatures to levels harmful for organisms and fish¹.

Currently, irrigated agricultural dischargers (owners and operators) are required to enroll in an existing Order to control waste discharges. The Water Board is planning to revise the current order to better address the current degraded conditions.

CEQA SCOPING MEETING AND SCHEDULE

The CEQA scoping meeting will provide participants with: (1) a summary of the New Order under development and potential alternatives, and (2) an opportunity to comment on the appropriate scope and content of the environmental analysis and environmental documentation for the Project to be prepared pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) (Public Resources Code Section 21000 et seq.).

Interested persons are specifically requested to provide information about:

- The methods they or responsible parties could foreseeably use to comply with the conditions proposed in the New Order;
- Estimated costs of such methods of compliance;
- Potentially significant environmental impacts of the Project, including environmental impacts of the foreseeable methods of compliance;
- Reasonable alternative means of compliance that would have less significant adverse environmental impacts;
- Reasonable mitigation measures that would minimize any unavoidable significant adverse environmental impacts associated with the means of compliance;

¹ Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board, Preliminary Draft Report, Draft Staff Recommendations for an Agricultural Order, February 2010.

http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/centralcoast/water_issues/programs/ag_waivers/ag_order.shtml

² Carle, S.f., B.K. Esser, J.E. Moran, High-Resolution Simulation of Basin-Scale Nitrate Transport Considering Aquifer System Heterogeneity, *Geosphere*, June 2006, v.2, no. 4, pg. 195-209.

³ Data obtained using GeoTracker GAMA (Groundwater Ambient Monitoring and Assessment) online database, <http://geotracker.waterboards.ca.gov/gama/>.

⁴ Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board, Clean Water Act Sections 305(b) and 303(d) Integrated Report for the Central Coast Region, June 2009, http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/centralcoast/water_issues/programs/tmdl/303d_list.shtml.

- Project alternatives;

An agenda for the CEQA scoping meeting will be posted by July 30, at the website below. General information about project descriptions and alternatives can be found at: http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/centralcoast/water_issues/programs/ag_waivers/ag_order.shtml

Preliminary Draft Staff Recommendations for an Agricultural Order can be found at: http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/centralcoast/water_issues/programs/ag_waivers/docs/ag_preliminary_report.pdf
Documents are also available by request at the office of the Central Coast Water Board.

Water Board staff will accept verbal comments at the CEQA scoping meeting and written comments received by August 27, 2010. Water Board staff will not prepare written responses to verbal comments received at this meeting or written comments received by August 27, 2010. However, Water Board staff will address all significant environmental points in the final reports that will be provided to the Water Board at the hearing planned for February 2011.

TO RECEIVE AGRICULTURAL ORDER RENEWAL INFORMATION

The Water Board is finalizing the Agricultural Order Renewal Interested Persons List. To receive Agricultural Order Renewal information, please subscribe to the Agricultural Discharges electronic mailing list at:
http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/resources/email_subscriptions/reg3_subscribe.shtml

Interested persons may also request to have Agricultural Order Renewal information hardcopies via U. S. Mail using the contact information below. Persons who subscribe to the electronic mailing list or who request a hard copy of information will be included in the Interested Persons List and will receive future notices of Water Board activities; those that do not make such a request will not be included on the list.

CONTACT INFORMATION

Questions regarding CEQA Scoping or the Project should be directed to Lisa McCann (805) 549-3132 or lmccann@waterboards.ca.gov. Please email written comments to AgOrder@waterboards.ca.gov with "CEQA Comment" in the subject line of the email, or mail to 895 Aerovista Place, Suite 101, San Luis Obispo, CA 93401-7906, attention Shanta Keeling.

cc: Interested Parties List Agricultural Order
File: Agricultural Order Renewal

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